

Unpacking the Transition from Military Service to Civilian Life

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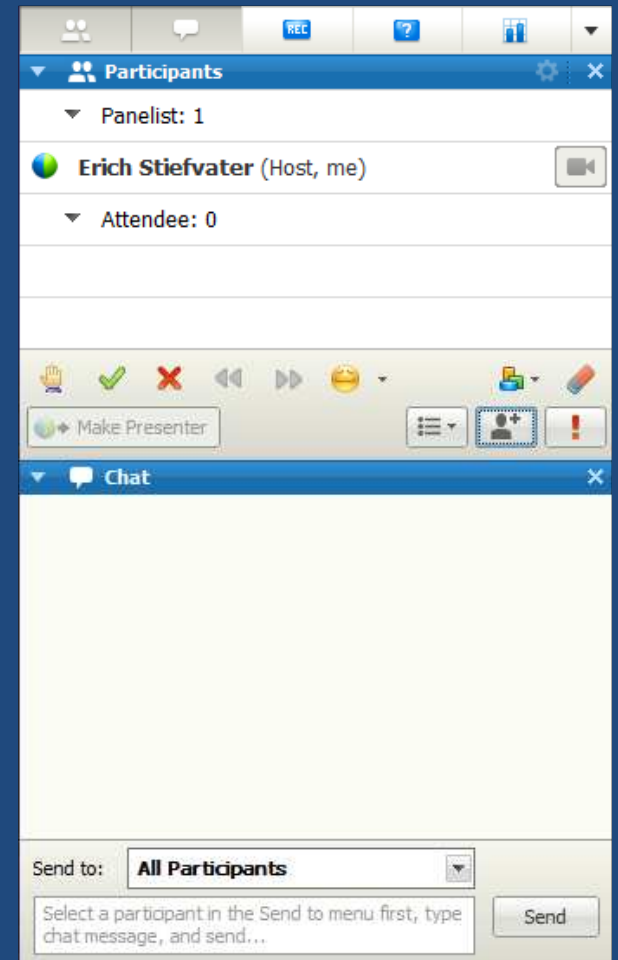
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Hello and Welcome!



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CNCS



Bob Reeg
American Legion Auxiliary
Call to Service Corps

Webinar hosts:
Debbie Ellis and Nicky Martin, Education Northwest

Unpacking the Transition from Military Service to Civilian Life

National service projects are being called upon to support our Service members and their families as they exit military service and return to their communities.

- So what next?
- What do transitioning Service members experience?
- What are their needs?
- What are the needs of their family members?
- What do they wish from community organizations and individual citizens?

Learning Goals

- Understand the transition experience for current conflict Service members and their families through first-person accounts
- Determine potential resources and service gaps for transitioning Service members and their families
- Identify opportunities for national service projects to address resources and service needs of transitioning Service members and their families

Today's Presenters



Lydia I. Marek, Ph.D., LMFT
Family and Community
Research Lab, Virginia Tech



James Casey,
AmeriCorps VISTA
The Mission Continues



Nicola Winkel, MPA
Arizona Coalition for Military
Families

Coming Home: What We Know About Reintegration

Lydia I. Marek, Ph.D.

Family and Community Research Lab
Department of Human Development
Virginia Tech



Imarek@vt.edu

Reintegration is...

- The process of “coming home” after deployment
- Often considered to be the final stage in the deployment cycle, but due to increased operations tempo may also be a pre-deployment stage
- Currently affecting thousands of military families due to drawdown in troops
- An important process to understand because of its affect on families, couple relationships, parenting roles, mental and emotional health, and impacts on the larger civilian and military communities

Why Supports are Needed:

- Returning Service members frequently demonstrate one or more of the following: low frustration tolerance, poor anger management, difficulties in coping and self regulation, hyper-vigilance, social withdrawal and high risk for alcohol and other substance abuse
- Numerous studies suggest that relationship stress and negative family functioning may peak between four to nine months after a Service member returns
- The unexpected stress during what was planned to be a happy time of reunion often increases family conflict, marital distress, and depression which leads to individual and family malfunction or dysfunction

Reintegration Affects Service Members

- Role changes:
 - The family often renegotiates roles during the Service member's absence, which results in the Service member feeling “isolated” or “useless” when he or she returns
 - Threatens family stability
 - Lack of “place” within the family
- Lack of purpose:
 - In their unit, Service members had a concrete purpose but they may lose this sense of purpose upon re-entry into a civilian community

Reintegration Affects Service Members

- Lack of shared experience:
 - The family had shared experiences during the Service member's absence and the Service member had shared experiences with the unit, but they probably did not have this shared experience with each other
- Mental Health:
 - Stigma surrounding mental health diagnosis and feelings about being “weak”
 - Sub-clinical symptoms of PTSD still cause problems for individuals and families

Reintegration Affects The Family

- Over 1 million Service members are parents
- Military families face unique stressors associated with deployment:
 - Financial strain
 - Stress associated with chronic concern for the Service member's safety
 - Long periods of family separation
 - Frequent relocation
 - Uncertain deployment length

Reintegration Affects Spouses/Significant Others

- **A Service member's spouse/significant other often needs to:**
 - Fit the deployed spouse back into the home routine
 - Re-balance child responsibilities
 - Get to know the deployed spouse again
 - Worry about the next deployment
 - Deal with the deployed spouse's mood changes
 - Figure out who to turn to for advice (Chandra et. al, 2011)

Reintegration Affects Spouses/Significant Others

- Post-deployment (reintegration) is the most important stage for Service members and their spouses or significant others for future marital satisfaction and cohesiveness
- This period requires role renegotiation and clarification of expectations

Goals for this time:

1. clarify and potentially reduce expectations
2. take time to become reacquainted with one another
3. work on building communication (Pincus, 2001)

Reintegration Affects Children

- Youth express concerns about:
 - Adjusting to fit the deployed parent back into the home routine
 - Worrying about the next deployment
 - Dealing with the Service member's mood changes
 - Worrying about how parents are getting along
 - Becoming reacquainted with the Service member
 - Figuring out to who to go for support and advice

Children's Risks Moderated By:

- Age and gender
 - Older females who experienced longer deployments were at greater risk for reintegration difficulties
 - Males may have more difficulty adjusting to reduced autonomy and increased structure when the deployed parent returns home
- Stage of emotional and cognitive development
- Cumulative length of deployment
- Degree of marital adjustment and stability
- The at-home caregiver's satisfaction with military and community supports
- Coping of the civilian parent
- Individual adjustment and emotional development of the parents

Resiliency

- Mechanisms of resiliency:
 - Role flexibility
 - Active coping
 - Maintaining communication/contact during deployment
 - Realistic expectations
- Supports should focus on these resiliency mechanisms:
 - Formal supports (programs, activities, counseling, etc.)
 - Informal supports (friends, family, non-military community, military community, etc.)

Family Resiliency Factors

Adaptations that can serve as protective factors and ease the family into the reintegration process:

1. Maintaining contact through email, Skype, and letter writing during deployment
2. Being able to have role flexibility with the ability to effectively perform multiple roles
3. Using active coping skills
4. Having all family members maintain realistic expectations during this reintegration process
5. Developing a shared family narrative and collaborative meaning-making
6. Open communication within the family
7. Effective parental leadership
8. Strong and effective marital relationships

Going Forward

- Research needs to balance between strengths-based or resilience approaches and those emphasizing psychopathology and its transmission
- Many Service members have been surveyed about their experiences of reintegration years after returning from deployment
- Measures used in prior research have limited psychometric information reported
- Data are seldom gathered from multiple informants
- There is insufficient attention to theory, thereby limiting the application and building of family stress and resilience research and understanding

Current and Future Research: Virginia Tech's National Reintegration Study

- Research will focus on numerous outcomes including:
 - Potential gender differences between men and women in the military and their experience of reintegration (identified as a need by a 2011 Pew Research Report)
 - Length of time home from last deployment
 - Children's needs determined by age and gender
 - Needs for returning Service members and their families
 - Experiences of dual military households with respect to all variables
 - Cumulative length of deployments and stress and coping, etc...

Transition and the Journey to Find Oneself

James Casey
AmeriCorps VISTA, *The Mission Continues*
US Army Reserve Veteran
Operation Iraqi Freedom Veteran



What does it mean to serve?

- Voluntary enlistment to serve
- Mission success versus personal gain
- Trained in personnel and project management
- Ability to operate in less than ideal conditions, with limited resources, to ensure mission success
- Trained to lead from day one

What does it mean to serve at home?

- Engagement in the community
- Reconnection to non-combat lifestyle
- Renewed sense of purpose and mission
- Innovation and thought leadership
- Pride in serving the community, and Nation
- Strengthened families and communities

Community Capacity Building

Nicola Winkel, MPA
Arizona Coalition for Military Families



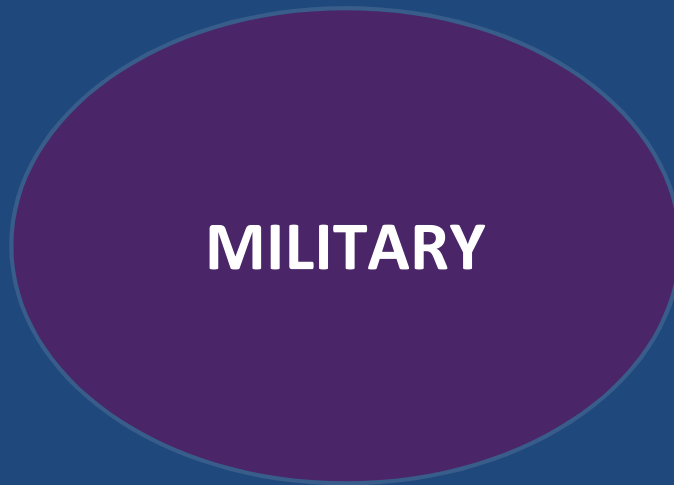
Arizona Coalition for Military Families

The Arizona Coalition for Military Families is a **public/private partnership** focused on building Arizona's capacity to care for and support all Service members, veterans, their families and communities.

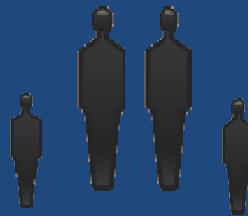
Every Service member, veteran and family member connected to the right program, service and/or benefit at the right time.

On-Going Needs Assessment

**Feedback from Service members,
veterans and family members relating
to transition and accessing resources.**



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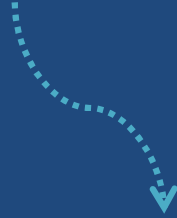
Focus on Coordination and Collaboration

- **Across sectors:** Military, Government, Community
- **Across population:** Active Duty, Guard, Reserve, Veterans, Families, Communities
- **Across geography:** statewide, regional
- **Across areas of focus/need:** health, financial, legal, education, employment, etc.

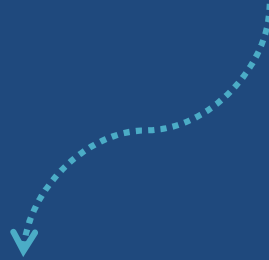
Focus on Capacity-Building

- Focus on nuts and bolts (in addition to warm and fuzzy)
- Emphasis on quality of care and resources, not only quantity.
- Leverage available assets
 - In-kind support
 - Partnerships
 - National Service

1. Build Awareness



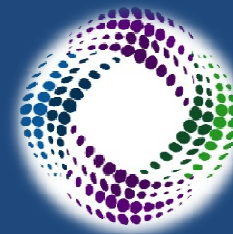
2. Vet the Partners

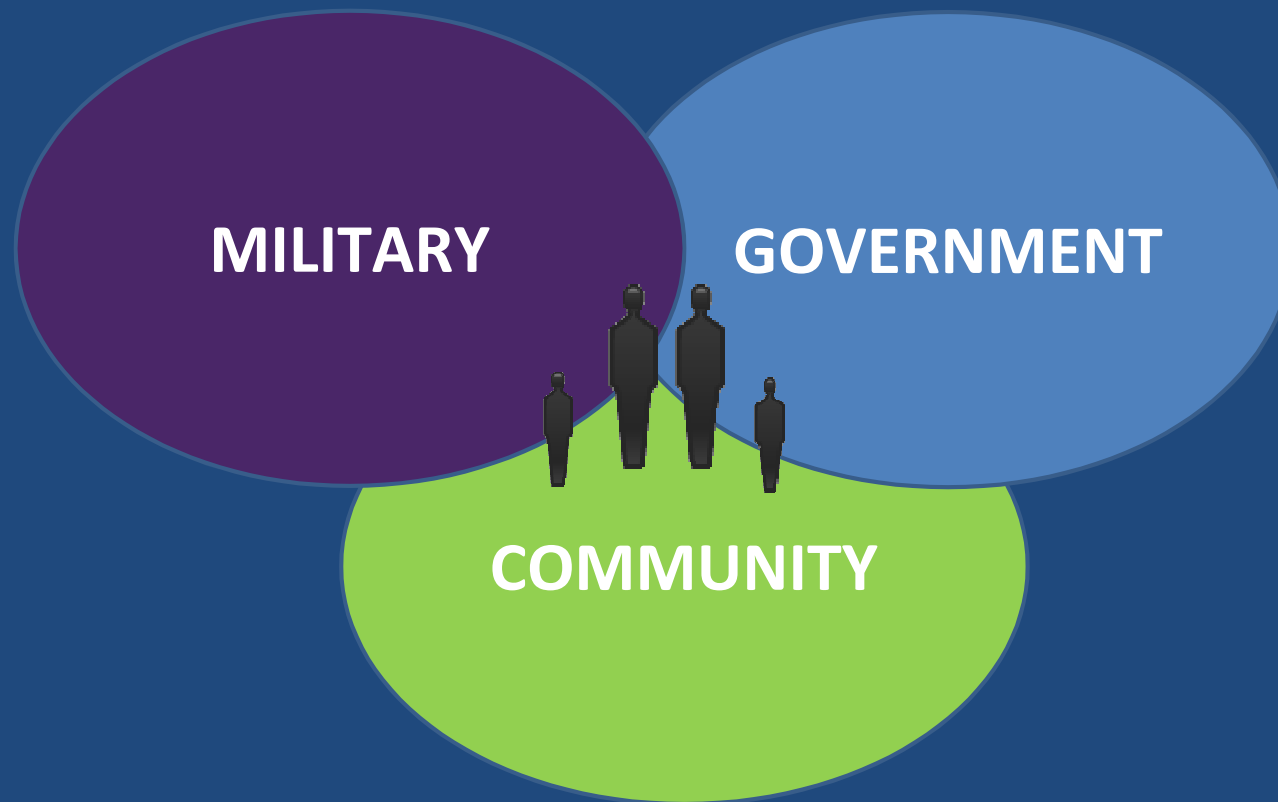


3. Equip People,
Organizations and Systems



4. Connect





Engage and equip all public and private sector partners to collectively provide the best care and support possible to all Service members, veterans and family members.

QUESTIONS?

For Further Information

- **Lydia I. Marek, Ph.D.** – lmarek@vt.edu
(540) 231-6306
- **James Casey** – jcasey@missioncontinues.org
missioncontinues.org
- **Nicola Winkel** – nicola@arizonacoalition.org
www.ArizonaCoalition.org

To Continue this Discussion...and others

Veterans and Military Families Knowledge Network

www.nationalserviceresources.org/veterans

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Wednesday, November 28

**Navigating Generational
Differences among Veterans
and Veterans Organizations**

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